

TESTIMONY OF JIM BROWN
ON BEHALF OF THE MONTANA WOOL GROWERS ASSOCIATION
IN SUPPORT OF HB 287
108 S. PACIFIC ST.
DILLON, MT 59725

INTRODUCTION

- Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee
- On behalf of the members of the Montana Wool Growers Association, and on behalf of the \$3 billion dollar industry that is agriculture in Montana, I rise today in strong support of HB 287.
- As Representative Clark stated, this bill is at the request of the membership of the Montana Wool Growers Association.
- And, as Representative Clark stated, the purpose of this bill is to both make productive use of wolves killed by government agents and to bring attention of the need for this legislature to adequately fund the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board.

THE PROBLEM

- When the State of Montana studied the environmental consequences of adopting a wolf management, it recognized that the wolf had, was, and will kill livestock in Montana.
- Further, when adopting the wolf management plan, the State of Montana recognized that the presence of the wolf on Montana's landscape would have a negative financial impact on Montana's farming and ranching community – decreasing Montana agriculture income and increasing the cost of doing business for Montana's farmers and ranchers.
- I have brought with me the relevant portions of the EIS for the Committee's review.
- The environmental review recognized that livestock owners would be the ones to suffer most directly from the push to increase wolf populations in Montana.
- In order to mitigate the damage done by the presence of the wolf, the Legislature created the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board, whose mission is to minimize predation on livestock, to provide compensation for depredated livestock, and to prevent livestock-wolf conflicts.
- The mission of the board is sound and the Board, when it has adequate funding, carries out its mission well.
- However, as just noted, the problem is that the Board has, since its creation in 2007, been seriously underfunded.

- The problem of underfunding is being compounded by the fact that the number of wolf depredations has exploded over the last several years, to the point that where gray wolf kills on livestock in Montana occurred at the rate of an animal per day in 2009.
- The sharp increase in wolf depredations has depleted severely the resources of the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board.
- In 2009, the Board expended \$145,000 of its \$150,000 budget to compensate the ranching community for losses.
- In 2008, the Board ran out of funds to pay all the 2008 death losses.
- All payments being made by the Board are going for death losses; no money is being spent for the loss prevention mission of the Board. This is a trend that not projected to change in the near future.
- Further, compounding the problem for the ranching community is the fact that only one in eight wolf kills are confirmed, thereby shifting the true cost of wolf management to the farming and ranching community.

THE SOLUTION:

- As Representative Clarke referenced in her opening, the purpose of today's bill is to bring attention to the fact that the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board exists and to bring attention to the need to adequately fund the Board, so that it may carry out its mission.
- It is my hope that this Legislature will consider fully funding the Board's requested appropriation amount of \$300,000.
- In the meantime, the Board needs revenue.
- If enacted, this legislation would provide the Board with an additional source of revenue.
- That is, it would allow the hides of wolves killed during wolf management activities to be sold or auctioned by the Board for the purpose of raising money for the Board's activities.
- As explained in the fiscal note to this legislation, wolf pelts are only of merchantable quality about 3 months of the year – generally November, December, and January.
- Based on past numbers, roughly 15 quality hides a year will be sold or auctioned, raising roughly \$7500 for the Board per year.
- The MWGA realizes that \$7500 is not a significant amount, when the Board is paying out roughly \$100,000 per year in losses.
- But, it is a start and, as explained by Representative Clark, MWGA's membership is hopeful that this attempt to raise state funds for the Board will lead to more matching federal dollars.
- By passing this legislation, this Committee will be giving a recognition of the need to adequately fund the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board, which such funding is integral to the success of Montana's wolf management plan.

CONCLUSION:

- MWGA members understand wildlife plays an enriching role in our lives. That is why we believe that making productive use of wolf hides is in the best interests of the State of Montana.
- Further MWGA's membership recognizes that Montana's gray wolf population will be delisted at some future point in time.
- That is also why MWGA will continue to advocate bills such as this one that both seek to implement Montana's wolf management plan and seek to bring attention to the fact that Montana will, at some point in time, find sources of revenue to fund wolf management in Montana.
- On behalf of MWGA's membership, I respectfully request this Committee give this bill a 'do pass' and it to the House floor for full consideration.



GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF
BUDGET AND PROGRAM PLANNING

Fiscal Note 2013 Biennium

Bill # HB0287

Title: Collection of wolf hides for benefit of livestock loss reduction & mitigation

Primary Sponsor: Clark, Christy

Status: As Introduced

- ☐ Significant Local Gov Impact ☒ Needs to be included in HB 2 ☐ Technical Concerns
- ☐ Included in the Executive Budget ☐ Significant Long-Term Impacts ☐ Dedicated Revenue Form Attached

FISCAL SUMMARY

	<u>FY 2012 Difference</u>	<u>FY 2013 Difference</u>	<u>FY 2014 Difference</u>	<u>FY 2015 Difference</u>
Expenditures:				
General Fund	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
State Special Revenue	\$1,125	\$1,125	\$1,147	\$1,170
Revenue:				
General Fund	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
State Special Revenue	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$7,500
Net Impact-General Fund Balance:	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$0</u>

Description of fiscal impact: HB 287 would increase revenue into the livestock loss reduction and mitigation account (LLRMB).

FISCAL ANALYSIS

Assumptions:

1. It is assumed that there are three months when wolf carcasses are of prime quality for tanning and auctioning. It is assumed that 15 hides per year will be taken.
2. It is assumed that quality hides can be auctioned at an average of \$500 a piece generating \$7,500 (\$500 x 15) per year state special revenue and deposited in the LLRMB account.
3. Tanning costs are \$75 per hide. (\$75 x 15 = \$1,125)
4. There is a 2% per year inflation factor applied to expenses in FY 2014 and FY 2015.
5. No spending authority is required in HB 2 for the remaining additional revenue into the LLRMB program.

	<u>FY 2012 Difference</u>	<u>FY 2013 Difference</u>	<u>FY 2014 Difference</u>	<u>FY 2015 Difference</u>
<u>Fiscal Impact:</u>				
<u>Expenditures:</u>				
Operating Expenses	\$1,125	\$1,125	\$1,147	\$1,170
TOTAL Expenditures	<u>\$1,125</u>	<u>\$1,125</u>	<u>\$1,147</u>	<u>\$1,170</u>
<u>Funding of Expenditures:</u>				
General Fund (01)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
State Special Revenue (02)	\$1,125	\$1,125	\$1,147	\$1,170
TOTAL Funding of Exp.	<u>\$1,125</u>	<u>\$1,125</u>	<u>\$1,147</u>	<u>\$1,170</u>
<u>Revenues:</u>				
General Fund (01)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
State Special Revenue (02)	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$7,500
TOTAL Revenues	<u>\$7,500</u>	<u>\$7,500</u>	<u>\$7,500</u>	<u>\$7,500</u>
<u>Net Impact to Fund Balance (Revenue minus Funding of Expenditures):</u>				
General Fund (01)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
State Special Revenue (02)	\$6,375	\$6,375	\$6,353	\$6,330

*Sponsor's Initials*_____
*Date*_____
*Budget Director's Initials*_____
Date

**DEPARTMENT OF LIVESTOCK**

Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation

The Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program was established by the legislature in 2007 to address economic losses due to wolf predation and to create incentives for producers to take proactive, preventative steps to decrease the risk of loss.

The purpose of the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program is to acknowledge the importance of economic viability and sustainability of individual livestock operators in Montana who are negatively affected by wolf recovery. Specifically, the purpose of the loss reduction and mitigation programs are:

- To provide financial reimbursements to producers for losses caused by wolves based on program criteria.

- To proactively apply prevention tools and incentives to decrease the risk of wolf-caused losses.

Mission

To help support Montana Livestock communities by reducing the economic impacts of wolves on individual producers by reimbursing confirmed and probably wolf-caused losses and helping to reduce their losses by approving projects and funding programs that will discourage wolves from killing livestock.

Goals & Objectives

- Develop a compensation framework that integrates with the overall Montana wolf program.

- Develop an incentive program that integrates with the overall Montana wolf program.

- Recognize the importance of economic viability and sustainability of individual livestock operators in Montana.

- Recognize the complex interactions between livestock and wolves.

- Seek a broad range of funding sources to meet the needs to provide long-term, viable "compensation" solutions.

- Work with federal and state agencies to develop a broad spectrum of options to reduce conflicts and potential depredations.

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Questions as Livestock Losses Skyrocket

Posted by **admin** on December 22nd, 2010

By **Myers Reece** (<mailto:mreece@flatheadbeacon.com>) ,
12-22-10, Flathead Beacon

At the request of the Montana Cattlemen's Association, the USDA Wildlife Services bureau recently released statistics that show a huge increase in the number of livestock killed by all of Montana's major predators, from coyotes to black bears to wolves.

But the report has drawn skeptics, including a former Wildlife Services supervisor who says the numbers are misleading and come at a pivotal time in wolf politics, with several bills circulating in Congress to remove the animal's federal protections.

John Steuber, Montana's Wildlife Services director, blames wolves for the across-the-board depredation increases. His bureau investigates, documents and tries to prevent livestock attacks in Montana. He said wolves have hamstrung his agency by requiring too many resources and limiting what kinds of deterrents – such as a certain pesticide – can be used due to federal protections.

The result, Steuber said, is that predators other than wolves now have more opportunities at livestock, which he said is reflected in the report.

The report compares livestock depredations in 2006 to 2010, divided into categories of coyotes, wolves, grizzly bears, black bears, mountain lions, red foxes, ravens and eagles. Livestock animals are listed by type and quantity killed and injured. The findings are dramatic.

For example, the report states that coyotes killed 111 calves in 2006 and 1,348 in 2010, a 1,114 percent increase, based on the federal fiscal year between Oct. 1 and Sept. 30. Wolves killed 51 calves in 2006 and 454 this year, a 790 percent increase. Other figures, such as sheep kills by black bears and mountain lions, show similarly massive leaps.

But what's not made clear is that only some of those are confirmed kills. Also included in the calculations are probable, possible and reported depredations. Carter Niemeyer, Montana's western supervisor for Wildlife Services from 1975-1990, said presenting the information in this manner is misleading.

Niemeyer also served as Wildlife Services' Montana wolf specialist for 10 years and later as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's wolf recovery coordinator in Idaho.

Niemeyer said that only probable and confirmed kills should be considered. And even listing a depredation as probable, Niemeyer said, means "it probably was a predator." When Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks publishes its annual report, it lists only confirmed wolf kills.

"Probable is foggy, but possible is pretty much unknown and reported doesn't really mean anything," Niemeyer said. "It's that confirmed one that's really the one of interest, the one that counts."

Most livestock deaths are due to natural causes, Niemeyer said. Once scavengers get a carcass, it becomes difficult to tell if the animal was killed by a predator first or died naturally first. Niemeyer doubted the 1,348 calf depredations by coyotes.

"I can't even imagine that," Niemeyer said. "My whole career with Wildlife Services it was pretty unusual to see calves killed by coyotes."

LIVESTOCK FATALITIES BY PREDATOR

Coyotes

■ Calves - 111 in 2006; 1,348 in 2010

■ Adult Sheep - 135 in 2006; 422 in 2010

Wolves

■ Calves - 51 in 2006; 454 in 2010

■ Adult Sheep - 22 in 2006; 728 in 2010

Grizzly Bears

■ Calves - 5 in 2006; 32 in 2010

■ Adult Sheep - 2 in 2006; 29 in 2010

Black Bears

■ Calves - 8 in 2006; 32 in 2010

■ Adult Sheep - 43 in 2006; 106 in 2010

Source: USDA Wildlife Services

Steuber argued that, on the other hand, "to say that wolves killed only what you can find is pretty misleading too." Steuber said many depredations aren't reported or found. A small lamb killed by a wolf doesn't leave many remains behind, he said.

Steuber said he didn't have the breakdown of confirmed, probable, possible and reported. Completing the report in the first place, he said, was an unusual move, done at the request of the Montana Cattlemen's Association. The statistics for 2007-2009 weren't available either, he said.

"If you look at it objectively, then yeah, with probable or confirmed we know they are wolf kills; the other ones we don't know," Steuber said. "But you can look at it both ways with all of those other ones that aren't reported."

In regards to calves killed by coyotes, Steuber said there are 3 million cows in Montana, which means "there's a lot of calves that hit the ground in spring and they're very susceptible to coyotes." Furthermore, he trusts ranchers' reports.

"I'm not going to question what the producers are telling us," Steuber said. "I would tend to believe them."

George Edwards, Montana's livestock loss mitigation coordinator, also said the number of reported depredations is far less than the actual number. But when they are called in, Edwards believes Steuber's bureau gets them right.

"I do believe those USDA numbers," Edwards said.

After the Wildlife Services bureau conducts an investigation on a livestock death, a rancher can choose to file a claim with Edwards' board. Edwards said the WS agents conduct thorough necropsies that take into account the size of fang, hemorrhaging and other details.

"I liken it to a CSI show," Edwards said. "I have full faith in those guys."

Kim Baker, president of the Montana Cattlemen's Association, said the USDA report reflects what ranchers are seeing across the state. Baker requested the statistics from Steuber.

"A lot of our members are having a lot more issues with predators," Baker said.

Baker acknowledged the impact that factors such as sprawling human development may have on predator behavior, but she echoed Steuber in calling wolves the primary culprit. Ranchers, she said, "can't really trap anymore because of the wolves, since they're on the endangered species list, and we can't really snare them."

"There hasn't been a great rise in livestock, so there's not just more livestock out there for them," Baker said.

"And it's not like ranchers," she added, "have gotten lazier or less vigilant in watching over their livestock."

Steuber's agents set traps out in the field. But if there are wolves in the area, the traps must be checked daily, which he said limits how many can be set and hurts his agency's effectiveness.

"You can imagine if you're working on four or five or six different ranches, it's pretty hard to check those traps every day," Steuber said.

Defenders of Wildlife no longer provides compensation for livestock killed by wolves except in Oregon, according to Northern Rockies representative Suzanne Stone. Federal funds are available, but Oregon hasn't received any yet, she said.

Edwards said the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board used \$145,000 of its allotted \$150,000 in 2009. He said the board received \$140,000 more in federal funds in July and has \$89,000 left to last through next June. He's unsure about future funding.

"Right now it's a waiting game," Edwards said. "We hope that there's going to be some state funds available; in order to get federal funds I really have to have matching state funds."

Stone, from Defenders of Wildlife, believes progress is being made across the West in reducing conflicts between ranchers and wolves. Recent reports coming out of Idaho and Wyoming indicate a decline in wolf predation on livestock this year. Like Niemeyer, Stone questioned the methods used in compiling and presenting the USDA report.

"When they're done like that, those numbers are really unreliable," Stone said.

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Wolf attacks on Montana livestock spike, stirring backlash

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Gray wolves killed livestock in Montana at the rate of an animal per day in 2009, stirring a backlash against the predators in rural areas and depleting a program that compensates ranchers for their losses.

The sharp increase over 2008 livestock losses, reported Thursday by state officials, was fueled largely by a wolf pack ravaging 148 sheep in southwestern Montana near Dillon in August.

"They are beautiful creatures, but they're also very deadly. They'll go out and hamstring a bunch of animals just for fun," said Barb Svenson of Reed Point, whose family ranch lost more than 30 sheep in attacks over the last two years.

"They're killing our income," she added.

Wolf attacks account for only a small fraction of sheep and cattle losses in the Northern Rockies. Disease, weather and coyotes each take more.

But wolves attract particular disdain because of their viciousness -- many killed animals are left uneaten -- and because of historic prohibitions against hunting the predators.

About 1,650 wolves roam the Northern Rockies, most of them descended from just 66 animals

introduced to the region in the mid-1990s by the federal government.

Montana and Idaho launched inaugural wolf hunts in September, in part to put the fast-expanding population in check. The hunts came just six months after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took wolves off the federal endangered species list.

It's uncertain if the hunts will be repeated in 2010. A pending lawsuit from environmentalists could put wolves back on the list by late spring or early summer, said attorney Bob Lane with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The suit is before U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy, who overturned the federal government's first attempt to strip protections for wolves in 2008. Legal arguments in the case are due by the end of the month.

If the environmentalists lose, Lane said his agency would likely increase Montana's wolf hunting quota. It was 75 wolves in 2009, although only 72 were taken.

Hunters in Idaho, where the season continues through March, so far have taken 142 wolves out of a 220-animal quota.

About 300 more wolves were killed by ranchers and wildlife agents in the Northern Rockies in response to livestock attacks and by other causes.

Wyoming's 300 wolves remain on the endangered list.

Meanwhile, 365 sheep, cattle, horses and dogs killed by wolves have been tallied in Montana for 2009, said George Edwards, coordinator of a Montana program to compensate ranchers who suffer losses.

That's up more than 50 percent from 2008.

The animals' owners have been paid \$139,000 for their losses, leaving only about \$25,000 remaining in the state's compensation fund. Legislation sponsored by U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, a Montana Democrat, could soon boost the fund with federal money.

State and federal officials estimate that only one in eight wolf kills are confirmed. For many of the rest, proof needed to justify compensation is never found. Many sheep and cattle grazing on public lands in wolf country simply go missing.

"We don't assume this is going to go down or get less expensive," said Elaine Allestad, who chairs Montana's Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation board. "We assume we are going to have more losses."

-- Associated Press

Photo: A North American gray wolf snoozes in the shade at the California Wolf Center in August 2004. Credit: Don Bartlett / Los Angeles Times

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Montana Wool Growers Association Statement on HB 287, a bill to allow for the collection of wolf hides to raise revenue for the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board

Today, February 1, 2011, The Montana Wool Growers Association (MWGA) testified in support of a bill introduced by Representative Christy Clark of Choteau that would allow the hides from wolves killed by government agents to be sold or auctioned to raise funding for Montana's Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board (LLRMB).

The bill, HB287, was heard in the House Agriculture Committee and was introduced at the request of the membership of MWGA. The bill seeks to help the Board carry out its mission under both Montana Law and the wolf management plan (1) to compensate livestock owners for losses due to wolf depredations and (2) to help ranchers take proactive measures to prevent livestock-wolf conflicts. The bill is also designed to raise awareness of the Board's existence and mission, the need for the state and federal government to fully fund the Board at its authorized five million dollar level, and to put wolves killed by government agents to productive use.

MWGA President Dave Hinnaland thanked Representative Clark for carrying the bill on behalf of MWGA. Said Hinnaland, "given her prior experience in the sheep industry, Representative Clark knows the troubling statistics. In 2009, gray wolves killed livestock at a rate of an animal per day; yet, the program set up by the State of Montana, in cooperation with the federal government, to compensate livestock producers for their losses has never been adequately funded and continues to experience shortages due to the ever increasing number of wolf depredations. Further, the Board recognizes that for every confirmed livestock loss, there are seven additional livestock losses that are not confirmed and not reimbursed. Montana's sheep producers appreciate the fact that Representative Clark continues to work with us to pass legislation that would adequately fund all parts of Montana's wolf management plan now and into the future."

During his testimony in support of the bill, Jim Brown, MWGA's Director of Public Affairs, stated that making productive use of the hides of wolves killed by government agents is in the best interests of the State of Montana. At present, the government makes no productive use of these animals, their carcasses, or any parts of these animals when killed beyond the occasional donation of hides for 'educational or cultural purposes'. Brown testified that the sheep industry hopes that this legislation bring awareness of the need for the legislature and the federal government to fully reimburse livestock producers for wolf losses and for the need for environmental groups to allow public hunting of these animals, which will allow for greater tolerance of the species in Montana.

The Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board was created in 2007 by the Montana Legislature. Under the program, livestock owners who suffer verified losses to wolf depredations may submit a reimbursement claim to the board, which such claims must be investigated and confirmed as a probable wolf kill by the USDA's Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service's Wildlife Services Division. During her testimony in support of her bill, Representative Clark noted that the legislation that created the Board in 2007 also authorized that the Board to create up to a \$5 million trust fund to be used to make the program work. Clark stated that the trust fund has never been funded at any level approaching the \$5 million authorization and, in fact, struggles to keep up with payments on a daily and yearly basis. At present, the Board makes no expenditures for the livestock loss prevention portion of its mission.

Questions: contact Jim Brown, Public Relations Director for the MWGA at 406-925-1745 or MWGA President Dave Hinnaland at (406) 974-3690 or Immediate Past President John Helle at 406-660-0990